

Message Text

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EXDIS

FOLLOWING TELEGRAM FROM BEIRUT DATED MARCH 22, 1978
SENT SECSTATE WASHDC, AMMAN, DAMASCUS, TEL AVIV, JIDDA,
KUWAIT, USUN NEW YORK, JERUSALEM, TEHRAN INFO LONDON,
PARIS IS REPEATED TO YOU: QUOTE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 1540

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, ME, LE
SUBJ: ME STAFF GROUP - SOUTH LEBANON: PROBLEMS WITH ARAB BROTHERS

1. SUMMARY. BOUTROS SAYS SYRIANS UNWILLING PUT PRESSURE ON PLO
TO OBSERVE CEASEFIRE, TO PREVENT PASSAGE IRAQI CONVOYS OR TO
ADVANCE FROM ZAHRANI TO LITANI. SYRIANS SAY THAT, HAVING FAILED
TO FIGHT ISRAELIS, THEY CANNOT NOW REFUSE TO LET OTHER ARABS
HELP PLO OR BE ISRAELIS' POLICEMAN. THEY SAY PERHAPS THEY COULD
HELP IF DETAILED TIMETABLE FOR WITHDRAWAL COULD BE WORKED OUT.
BOUTROS SUGGESTS WE TRY GET SAUDIS WORK ON PLO AND SYRIANS TO
WORK ON IRAQIS. HE HOPES WE ARE MOVING TO GET WITHDRAWAL TIMETABLE
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AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND WONDERS WHETHER WE CAN WORK ON THE
SYRIANS REGARDING QUESTION OF ADVANCE TO LITANI. AMBBADOR COMMENTS
THAT SITUATION IS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER AND SUGGESTS WE SHOULD BE
CONSULTING NOT ONLY WITH LEADERS IN AREA BUT WITH SOVIETS,
BRITISH AND FRENCH ON COMMON ACTION TO CONTAIN THIS PROBLEM.
THOSE THREE COUNTRIES CAN PERHAPS BE PREVAILED UPON TO USE
THEIR INFLUENCE WITH PLO. END SUMMARY.

2. CALLED ON FONMIN BOUTROS 1000 LOCAL MARCH 22. GAVE HIM RUN-
DOWN ON SITUATION AS WE SAW IT AND OUR EFFORTS TO GATHER

SUPPORT FOR CEASEFIRE, INTRODUCTION OF UNIFIL, AND CESSATION OF IRAQI CONVOYS. BOUTROS THEN GAVE ME FOLLOWING RUNDOWN OF SITUATION IN LIGHT PM HOSS' VISIT TO DAMASCUS YESTERDAY.

3. FIRST HE SAID REPORTS OF LARGE NUMBER OF IRAQI VOLUNTEERS ARRIVING IN SOUTHERN BEKAA WERE TRUE. THEY CROSSED THROUGH MASNAH YESTERDAY. THE FIGURE WAS 500 OR 600. HE SAID IRAQIS IN PARTICULAR WERE SENDING MUNITIONS AND PERSONNEL, BUT EVEN JORDANIANS AND KUWAITIS WERE COOPERATING AT LEAST TO THE EXTENT OF LENDING TRUCKS, BECAUSE SOME OF THE TRUCKS CARRYING SUPPLIES AND PERSONNEL HAD JORDANIAN AND KUWAITI LICENSES. THE SYRIANS WERE DOING THE SAME. IT WAS A VERY DISTURBING SITUATION.

4. HOSS' VISIT TO DAMASCUS HAD NOT BEEN A SUCCESS. HE HAD TWO MAIN POINTS TO RAISE: PLO RESPECT FOR CEASEFIRE AND CESSATION OF IRAQI CONVOYS. WITH REGARD TO FIRST, SYRIANS SAID PLO WOULD COMPLY WITH CEASEFIRE ONE WAY OR ANOTHER WITHOUT ACTUALLY ANNOUNCING IT. IF THERE WERE OCCASIONAL VIOLATIONS BY INDIVIDUAL SOLDIERS, THEY WOULD NOT BE IMPORTANT AND SHOULD NOT PRECIPITATE AN INTERNATIONAL INCIDENT. (THIS IS SYRIAN VIEW AND NOT LEBANESE.) IN ANY EVENT, SYRIANS SAID THEY IN NO POSITION TO PUT ANY PRESSURE ON PLO AS LONG AS ISRAELIS OCCUPYING SOUTH LEBANON. THEY SUGGESTED THAT LEBANESE THEMSELVES PUT PRESSURE ON PLO.

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BOUTROS COMMENTED THAT SYRIAN ROOM FOR MANEUVER IN WAKE OF STEADFAST FRONT MEETING, AND GIVEN IRAQI PRESSURE, VERY LIMITED. ASSAD'S DECISION NOT TO GO TO INDIA INDICATED HE REALIZES JUST HOW DANGEROUS CURRENT SITUATION IS AND HIS REMARKS TO HOSS WERE IN EFFECT AN ADMISSION OF IMPOTENCE.

5. BOUTROS SAID THAT HE HAD FOUR QUESTIONS HE WANTED TO POSE:
A. WHAT COULD BE DONE ABOUT FINDING SOMEONE ELSE OTHER THAN THE SYRIANS TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PLO.
B. WHAT COULD BE DONE ABOUT IRAQ?
C. COULD WE FORESEE WORKING OUT A TIMETABLE FOR WITHDRAWAL?
D. IN THE PRESENT STAGE THE SYRIANS WERE NOT AT ALL PLEASED WITH THE IDEA OF MOVING FROM THE ZAHRANI TO THE LITANI. THEY DID NOT ENVISION THAT POSSIBILITY AT PRESENT BECAUSE IT WOULD MEAN A CLASH WITH THE PLO. THEY WERE UNWILLING TO BE ISRAEL'S POLICEMAN IN THE ZONE IN QUESTION, PARTICULARLY GIVEN THEIR FAILURE TO HELP STEM THE ISRAELI ADVANCE. THEY EVEN OPPOSED INSERTION OF LEBANESE TROOPS IN THAT AREA. WHAT TO DO?

6. BOUTROS THEN SAID HE HAD FOLLOWING SUGGESTED ANSWERS:
A. PERHAPS THE SAUDIS COULD BE CONVINCED TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE PLO. HE HAD CALLED THE SAUDI AMBASSADOR TO COME IN FOLLOWING MY CALL AND HOPED THAT WE WOULD URGE THE SAUDIS TO DO MORE THAN USUAL BECAUSE THE SYRIANS WERE IN AN EMBARRASSING POSITION AND THEIR ABILITY TO MOVE WAS LIMITED.
B. HE WONDERED WHETHER WE COULD GET IRAN TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE IRAQIS NOT TO SEND REINFORCEMENTS TO THE PLO. SURELY THE IRAN-

ANS UNDERSTOOD THE DANGER THAT SUCH SUPPORT POSED. IF IRAQIS WOULD EASE PRESSURE IN THIS RESPECT SYRIAN ABILITY TO REACT WOULD BE IMPROVED.

C. HE HOPED WE WOULD WORK WITH UN AND ISRAEL TO GET TIMETABLE FOR WITHDRAWAL SET UP AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE TIME.

D. HE WONDERED WHETHER U.S. COULD HELP WITH SYRIANS ON ADANCE TO LITANI.

7. I SAID WE WERE ALREADY WORKING ON ALL OF THE QUESTIONS HE SECRET

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HAD RAISED AND WOULD CONTINUE TO DO OUR BEST. WITH REGARD TO HIS FIRST QUESTION, WE HAD ALREADY SEND INSTRUCTIONS TO JIDDA TO MAKE DEMARCHE TO RIYADH. WE WERE SENDING SIMILAR INSTRUCTIONS TO KUWAIT. BOUTROS SAID KUWAITIS LIVED IN FEAR OF PLO AND KUWAIT WAS A LOST STATE. KUWAITIS WOULD NOT PUT PRESSURE ON PLO.

8. WITH REGARD TO SECOND POINT, WHAT TO DO ABOUT IRAQ, I DID NOT KNOW HOW MUCH INFLUENCE IRANIANS HAD OR WHAT THEY WOULD BE PREPARED TO DO, BUT I WOULD CERTAINLY TRANSMIT THE SUGGESTION.

9. I THOUGHT THIRD POINT (TIMETABLE) WAS PROBABLY EASIEST OF THE QUESTIONS HE HAD RAISED. IT WENT WITHOUT SAYING THAT SUCH A TIMETABLE WOULD BE WORKED OUT AND I WAS SURE WE WANTED IT TO BE DONE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE AND WERE WORKING TO THAT END.

10. WE HAD ALREADY BEEN IN TOUCH WITH SYRIANS ON THE QUESTIONS OF CONVOYS AND CEASEFIRE AND WOULD CONTINUE TO BE SO, BUT WE ALSO THOUGHT IT VERY IMPORTANT THAT SIILASVUO TALK TO THEM, PARTICULARLY REGARDING ADVANCE TO LITANI. BOUTROS SAID SIILASVUO WAS ASKING PERMISSION FROM UN TO DO SO AND HAD SAID HE WOULD COME BY BEIRUT FIRST AND TALK TO BOUTROS BEFORE GOING ON TO DAMASCUS.

11. COMMENT: AS WE HAD FEARED LAST WEEK, SYRIANS ARE RELUCTANT TO PLAY POLICEMAN ROLE WHICH THEY MUST EVENTUALLY DO IF WE ARE TO GET OUT OF PRESENT IMPASSE. AS LONG AS SYRIANS UNWILLING TO OCCUPY ZONE BETWEEN ZAHRANI AND LITANI AND IMPOSE OBSERVANCE OF CEASEFIRE ON PLO, ARRANGEMENTS FOR CEASEFIRE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO DEPEND ON INHERENTLY UNSTABLE COMMITMENTS FROM PALESTINIANS.

12. AS OF LAST NIGHT WE UNDERSTOOD SENIOR PALESTINIANS WERE WAYING THEY WOULD OBSERVE CEASEFIRE BUT UNIT COMMANDERS IN FIELD HAD ORDERS FROM SAME QUARTERS NOT TO OBSERVE CEASEFIRE SECRET

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AND TO SHOOT AT ANY PERSON WEARING FOREIGN ARMY UNIFORM. BOUTROS SAID LEBANESE GETTING SIMILAR MIXED SIGNALS. WE ARE IN UNFORTUNATE POSITION OF BEING ON BAD TERMS WITH THOSE STATES HAVING MOST INFLUENCE WITH PLO (LIBYA AND IRAQ). SAUDI

INFLUENCE IS CONFINED TO WEIGHT OF MONEY, IMPACT OF WHICH IS LIMITED, GIVEN RESOURCES PLO ALREADY CONTROLS ON ITS OWN, EVEN ASSUMING SAUDIS WOULD BE PREPARED TAKE POLITICAL FLAK INVOLVED IN THEIR TRYING IMPOSE CEASEFIRE OBSERVANCE ON RELUCTANT PLO.

13. SEE NO ALTERNATIVE TO TRYING SAUDIS, BUT THEY ARE GOING TO HAVE TO TAKE A MUCH MORE VIGOROUS POSITION THAN THEY HAVE TO DATE IF IT IS TO HAVE ANY EFFECT. I AM INCLINED TO AGREE WITH BOUTROS' OBSERVANCE THAT KUWAIT IS ALREADY LOST, BUT ONE SHOULD NOT GIVE UP THE SHIP AND A GOOD COLLEGE TRY THERE MIGHT HAVE SOME IMPACT. BELIEVE WE SHOULD ALSO SPEAK TO JORDANIANS ABOUT REPORT THEY ARE COOPERATING IN SENDING SUPPLIES TO PLO. SINCE JORDANIANS EXPORTED THEIR PLO PROBLEM TO LEBANON IN 1970, THEY SHOULD BE SENSITIVE TO ISSUES POSED FOR LEBANESE, AND EVENTUALLY THEMSELVES, TODAY.

14. HAVING SAID ABOVE, I SHOULD ADD THAT I THINK WE ARE AT A HIGHLY CRITICAL AND DANGEROUS STAGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. AS BOUTROS REMARKED, LEBANESE FRONT HAS IN EFFECT REJECTED ARRANGEMENTS WE HAVE MADE SO CAREFULLY THROUGH UN AND IS TALKING ABOUT SENDING CHARLES MALIK TO UN TO PLEAD THAT QUESTION OF PALESTINIAN PRESENCE THROUGHOUT LEBANON MUST BE DEBATED THERE. LEBANESE PARLIAMENTARIANS ARE ALSO AGITATING TO DEBATE PROBLEM PALESTINIAN PRESENCE NEXT WEEK. IF IRAQIS, JORDANIANS, KUWAITIS AND OTHERS CONTINUE SENDING SUPPLIES AND REINFORCEMENTS TO PLO, CHRISTIANS AS WELL AS ISRAELIS ARE GOING TO REACT. NIGHTMARE SCENARIO REFERRED TO IN BEIRUT 1526 OF CHRISTIAN-ISRAELI COMBINATION AGAINST SYRIANS AND PLO BECOMES POSSIBILITY. IF THAT HAPPENS, SLAUGHTER IS GOING TO BE IMMENSE AND PRESSURES ON SMALL AND GREAT POWERS TO INTERVENE ARE GOING TO BE INTENSE. ARAB LEADERS ARE GOING TO FIND THEMSELVES IN A DILEMMA RESULTING FROM GENERAL IRRESPONSIBILITY (WITH EXCEPTION OF ASSAD) TOWARDS
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LEBANON OVER PAST NINE YEARS.

15. I WONDER IF AT THIS JUNCTURE WE SHOULD NOT BE CONSULTING AT SENIOR LEVELS WITH BRITISH, FRENCH AND SOVIETS TO SEEK COMMON ACTION TO DEFUSE THIS PROBLEM. SOVIETS WHO REPORTEDLY ARE EMBARRASSED BY FATAH ACTIONS IN ISRAEL AND RESULTANT DEMANDS ON THEM TO COME TO AID OF PLO MAY HAVE SOME APPREHENSION OF REAL DANGERS AND MIGHT POSSIBLY BE WILLING TO USE THEIR INFLUENCE ON PALESTINIANS. BRITISH AND FRENCH OF COURSE HAVE CONTACTS WITH PLO AND WHILE IT WOULD NOT BE WISE TO EXAGGERATE THEIR INFLUENCE, AT LEAST THEY CAN TALK TO THEM, WHICH IS MORE THAN WE CAN SAY FOR OURSELVES.

16. I AM GLAD THAT PRESIDENT AND BEGIN HAVE FOCUSSED ON THE BIG PICTURE RATHER THAN THE LEBANESE JUNGLE, BUT THERE ISN'T GOING TO BE ANY PICTURE ON THE TUBE IF THIS AFFAIR IS NOT CONTAINED.
PARKER UNQUOTE VANCE

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